

Bible Stories

DANIEL – THE UNIVERSITY YEARS

Daniel 1:18-21

May 13, 2023

Historical Housekeeping

The book of Daniel is divided into 2 sections – the narratives (stories) and the prophetic visions.

The central theme of the book is the Sovereignty of God over all the earth – including nations who do not acknowledge Him.

Chapters 1:1-2:4a were written in Hebrew – indicating that these words were intended primarily for a Jewish audience.

Chapters 2:4b-6:28 were written in Aramaic – indicating that these words were intended to include the wider Gentile audience.

(Section of the book we will not cover: Chapter 7 was also written in Aramaic. Chapters 8-12 were written in Hebrew)

The 6 stories we find in the book of Daniel cover the roughly 70 years of Judah's exile history (605 BC – 539 BC).

University Days

In the book of Habakkuk, the author, concerned about the wickedness and evil he saw all around him, asked Yahweh how He could just watch and do nothing as His people destroyed themselves. Yahweh responded in this way, *“Look at the nations and observe be utterly astounded! For something is taking place in your days that you will not believe when you hear about it. Look! I am raising up the Chaldeans (Babylonians), that bitter, impetuous nation that marches across the earth's open spaces to seize territories not its own.”* Habakkuk 1:5-6

A few years later, in **605 BC** – Crown Prince Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (his father – Nabopolassar had not yet died) laid siege to Jerusalem. Daniel 1:2 tells us that Yahweh gave king Jehoiakim of Judah into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar so that he paid tribute, which included precious articles from the temple. In addition to the financial tribute, the best and brightest of Judah's nobility were also sent to Babylon. Among this group were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah.

Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring in some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility -- young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians.

In other words ---- these young men were to be indoctrinated into the culture, history and religion of Babylon – beginning with being given a new name. This *“education”* would last 3 years and would include room and board – specifically food and drink from the king's table. At the conclusion of the 3 years, each student would go into the king's service.

Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah were chosen and their names were changed to Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego.

The intent behind this policy was to absorb the captives into the culture of Babylon – wiping out any trace of their past – resulting in the transfer of loyalty from their old country to Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar.

That worked for 99.9% of all captives, but these 4 had a different definition of Loyalty.

Although they were good Jews, their loyalty did not rest on nation or religion. The entirety of their loyalty was focused on God and they could not give that loyalty to anyone else.

That's all fine and good in theory, but what were our young men going to do when brought face to face with a real-world choice? Well, Faithfulness/Loyalty are not Faithfulness/Loyalty if they are only *“practiced”* in theory or when times are good, and so.... they *“rebelled.”*

Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, so he asked the chief official for an alternative menu.

The Bible gives us no direct explanation for why Daniel refused the food and drink from the king's table, but here are some suggestions:

- It wasn't Kosher or they didn't eat meat.
- It was offered to idols.
- It was a way to "rebel" against assimilation into Babylonian culture.
- It was a way to demonstrate that their loyalty remained exclusively for God.

My personal take is that the primary motivation for our young men's choice #4.

Scripture tells us that God caused the palace official to look favorably on Daniel, but he was also accountable to Nebuchadnezzar. Failure to obey could result in great pain, so the official said, *"Listen Belteshazzar, I like you, but the king himself has assigned your food and drink. You don't want to look malnourished, do you? Anyway, the king will have my head if I allowed you to do this..... so, no."*

Daniel was respectful and polite, but he was also a man with a plan ---- *"Let's conduct a test. Give US what WE ask – veggies and water – for 10 days and let's see what happens."*

The official agreed and at the end of 10 days, our 4 young men looked healthier and better nourished than the young men who ate from the king's table ---- They were allowed to continue their unusual diet for their remaining years at university.

To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds. At the end of the time set by the king to bring them in, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service. In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom. And Daniel remained in service until the first year of King Cyrus.

What do we do with this story?

No doubt it was difficult to be taken from the only home and life our 4 had ever known and yet, "Daniel (and by extension, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah) purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself..."

The decision not to defile yourself is not made in the heat of passion or at the bar stool or in the twinkie aisle or at the office watercooler or at your computer when no one is looking. That decision must be made before the temptation ever presents itself.

Back home, before life changed forever, they had already declared their loyalty to Yahweh and drew a line over which they would not step. They drew the line before the concrete dried.

However, it's not enough to say, *"I'm not going to do that."* Just saying **NO** is often not enough of a motivation in and of itself to keep us from collapsing when temptation comes.

We are not simply saying no to temptation. We are saying **YES** to God. **YES** to our relationship with Him. **YES** to our loyalty to Him. **YES** to never doing anything that would wound His heart.

Our relationship with God becomes the backbone of our resolve.